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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to (1) examine and evaluate existing vocational programs at the secondary level and to identify such programs or components of programs which appear to be meeting the needs of the learning disabled and the employer; and (2) share these findings with persons responsible for providing vocational education for learning disabled students at the secondary level. The following activities were utilized to secure data: (1) Fifteen meetings were held with representatives from key groups to learn the location of recommended programs; (2) thirty onsite visits of recommended programs were conducted; (3) special meetings about previously unknown programs were attended; (4) a mail survey requesting program information from schools referred to in the literature as providing vocational education or programs for secondary level learning disabled students was conducted; and (5) telephone discussions relative to program offerings were frequently conducted. Three of the 10 conclusions formulated follow, all of which were intended to serve as points for self-evaluation and future directions for schools developing a specialized program: (1) A great majority of the secondary level programs are simply a continuation of the academically oriented elementary and junior high programs; (2) a great majority of the programs are conducted under the direction of the special education department; and (3) regular secondary level vocational programs as a rule do not permit learning disabled students to enroll. (EM)

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FINAL REPORT

A Study To Examine and Develop A
Comprehensive Model Of Identifying
And Providing Realistic Vocational
Education Experiences For Learning
Disabled Students.

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"A swift walker, if he happens to be walking with a child, gives him his hand and shortens his stride and does not go too fast for his small companion."

Quintilian (35-95)

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This study was conducted primarily in the State of Connecticut. A few school systems in the State of Massachusetts and one in New York were visited.

The Project Director was John T. Cassell, Professor, Special Education, Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, Connecticut.

Graduate Assistants assisting in the study were Elizabeth Beach and Charlotte Viani.

FINAL REPORT

A STUDY TO EXAMINE AND DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF IDENTIFYING AND PROVIDING REALISTIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCES FOR LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS.

Purpose of Study

In the late 1950's certain personnel responsible for the education of all children began to focus their attention on intellectually capable children who were incapable of achieving academic success in spite of frequent and varied remedial techniques. For purposes of labeling or classifying, these children were first referred to as "brain damaged", and in the early 60's as "perceptually handicapped". More recent and commonly accepted terminology refers to this group as "learning disabled".

The early concern was primarily in the area of identifying children whose learning problems would more closely meet this form of handicap rather than that of mental retardation, slow learner or emotionally/socially maladjusted. Programs or methods of instruction which would or could, in many cases, reduce the learning problems, lagged behind the methods of identification. In the meantime, and prior to the sudden interest in this group of now-identifiable children, the students were placed in various educational settings which included classes for the mentally retarded, for slow learners, for the emotionally/socially maladjusted, special tutoring, homebound

instruction and often, because of an emotional overlay affecting the child's behavior, the solution was often exclusion.

Initially, as special methods of assisting and instructing these children at the elementary level were developed, personnel capable of providing the instruction were not available. By the mid '60's a few colleges and universities had trained personnel who could now become involved in teacher training programs. As teachers became available, school systems established programs for children with learning disabilities. The focus of attention was, as might be expected, at the elementary level and with the more severely disabled pupils.

The second phase of program development for the learning disabled was that of early identification and prompted the screening of all kindergarten and first grade pupils. Many of the school systems that began their programs at this level are now realizing that many of the learning problems recognized and identified early in these children have not been eliminated but continue to exist, often in lessened degree. A large number of these, as stated earlier, intellectually capable students have now arrived at the Junior-Senior High level in advance of the development or identification of appropriate/suitable programs.

Aware of the problems created by the lack of information on/re suitable programs or practices, the major purpose of this study was designed 1.) to find, examine and evaluate existing programs at the secondary level and to identify such programs

or components of programs which appear to be meeting the needs of the learning disabled and the employer; and 2.) to share these findings with persons responsible for providing vocational education for learning disabled students at the secondary level.

The specific objectives of the project were stated as follows:

- (a) To examine existing vocational programs and to identify programs or components of programs which appear to be meeting the needs of the learning disabled and the employer.
- (b) To identify the relationship among the vocational interests, available options and employment for students identified as having a learning disability.
- (c) To develop strategies which will provide for more effective counseling as it relates to referral of the learning disabled to existing vocational programs.
- (d) To provide within existing vocational curricula, remedial options, so as to permit the maximum educational growth and adjustment of the learning disabled.
- (e) To provide, by the use of the skill cluster concept, an integration of employer needs with the task performance capabilities of the learning disabled.
- (f) To provide for the development of strategies which will permit the evolution of programs which will have the capability to meet the needs of the learning disabled.
- (g) To identify instruments which will measure the comparative effectiveness of occupational interests, counseling, vocational training and placement of previously identified students with learning disabilities.

DEFINITION OF THE LEARNING DISABLED SECONDARY STUDENT

For the purpose of focus or clarification, this study concerned itself with the student who had been previously identified as being learning disabled. The State of Connecticut accepts and utilizes the following definition, which is also the Definition of the USOE, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, 1969, and Public Law 91-230, dated April 13, 1970. Learning disabled children are those who "exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunctions, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage."

Operational Criteria

I. Achievement Criteria

The definition of learning disabilities specifies that a pupil will exhibit deficiencies in written and/or spoken language.

A. Written Language and Arithmetic

To satisfy this criteria, the pupil must be significantly underachieving in one or more of the following basic skill areas: reading, spelling, writing, and/or arithmetic. The extent of the pupil's deficiency is determined by his performance on standardized tests of these skills. For the deficiency to be considered serious, the discrepancy between chronological age and performance should be as follows:

Seventh grade: performance at 3.0 years below grade level.

Eighth grade and beyond: performance at 3.5 years below grade level.

B. Spoken Language

The assessment of spoken language is achieved through the use of measures of receptive and expressive semantics, syntax and morphology. The pupil must demonstrate a significant deficit of at least minus two standard deviations on one or more spoken language skills.

II. Intellectual Criteria

Recognizing that mentally retarded pupils may also have learning disabilities in addition to their intellectual deficit, such children are excluded from learning disabilities

programs if they do not meet the operational criteria listed below.

A. Group Intelligence Tests

A group intelligence test may be given and a pupil considered eligible so long as he scores above the minus one standard deviation cut-off point.

B. Individual Intelligence Tests

The pupil who scores below the minus one standard deviation cut-off point must be administered an individual intelligence test which has identifiable verbal and performance components. A pupil must score above the minus one standard deviation cut-off point on at least one major component of the individual intelligence test.

III. Emotional Criteria

Pupils with severe emotional disturbances, as judged by a psychiatrist or qualified psychologist, are not eligible for services for the learning disabled. This exclusion does not apply, however, to pupils who may exhibit difficulties in interpersonal relationships, be disruptive in class, exhibit temper episodes, lack of enthusiasm, poor attitude and/or motivation, or be suffering from boredom. In such cases, the pupil's emotional problems must be secondary to his learning disabilities in order to be eligible for this program.

IV. Other Criteria

Persistent truancy, class-cutting, overt aggression, involvement with police, defiance of school rules and regulations.

METHOD AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The following activities were utilized as means of securing information relative to conducting this study.

Search of the Literature:

Publications such as the Journal of Learning Disabilities, Teaching Exceptional Children, Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, Review of Special Education, Journal of Rehabilitation, Industrial Education, Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, American Vocational Journal, The Clearing House, Focus on Exceptional Children, Exceptional Parent and Journal of Special Education.

Other professional texts and literature which appeared to have a bearing on this study were secured and examined when possible.

This phase of the study was very time consuming and contributed very little to the study except to further point out that this particular aspect of educational programming is in need of much guidance and assistance in this initial stage of development.

Meetings:

A total of fifteen meetings were held with persons representing key agencies, associations or special interest groups closely allied to or having responsibility for learning disabled students. Consultants representing the Connecticut State Department of Education in the areas of Learning Disabilities and in Vocational Education were helpful in disseminating information and direction relative to both existing programs and needs.

Meetings with representatives of Associations for Children with Learning Disabilities were conducted for the purpose of again learning the location of commendable or promising programs and to

hear first hand what the concerns, expectations and suggestions of parents and parent representatives are.

Additional meetings were held with Special Education Directors, with Directors of Occupational Education Programs, with Secondary Level Vocational Education Personnel and with College Personnel engaged in teacher training in the areas of Vocational Education and in Special Education.

On Site Visits:

A total of thirty on site visits were conducted to view recommend programs first hand, to review records and to discuss specific details with the personnel involved in the operation of the program. In three cases more than one on site visit was made.

Attendance at Special Meetings:

During the period of this study, members of the study staff sought out and attended special meetings where it was felt that additional information or knowledge about previously unknown programs or program aspects may be learned.

Mail Survey:

A study utilizing the postal service was conducted to learn the extent to which Connecticut's private schools for Business and Technical Instruction accepted students or provided instruction for learning disabled clients.

Schools and other agencies referred to in the literature as providing Vocational Education or special programs for secondary level learning disabled students were contacted and information about their programs requested.

Telephone Communication:

Discussions via telephone relative to populations served and programs offered by various recommended school systems were frequently conducted and often resulted in a follow-up on site visit.

FINDINGS RELATIVE TO THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
AS SET FORTH IN THE GRANT APPLICATION

Although thirty programs were visited and examined, not one program was found that could be recommended to other schools seeking to develop specialized programs for this particular group. The findings of this study parallel the findings of research done by the Management Analysis Center, Inc. and published in the manual titled, Improving Occupational Programs for the Handicapped.¹ Of specific importance is the similarity of findings on the ways in which programs fail. First, "They fail to prepare the environment for the student as well as they prepare the student for the work environment. Secondly, they fail to take advantage of or solicit assistance from services or groups outside the immediate administration of the program. Thirdly, they do not ensure the relevance of program content to the job market and environment in which students will live when they graduate."²

While some isolated positive practices or promising components were located, this study, like the MAC project, found "that vocational services for the handicapped are generally weak. For example, they often fail to provide adequate solutions to the familiar problems of labeling and consigning the handicapped to certain menial types of training based on a too low achievement expectation. There is a lack of funds, good facilities, equipment and suitable teaching materials, but more important, too few instructors effectively serving this population. Coordination of

efforts among the different agencies responsible for providing services is poor. Supervision and monitoring of student progress is not adequate."³

More specific to this study and to the objectives proposed, the following is presented:

(a) Of the thirty programs visited and examined, none were found that could be recommended in toto to other school systems seeking a model to replicate. Although most programs proposed to provide specialized services utilizing similar personnel, the end results were often quite varied due to a number of factors. Among these factors were: the type of administrative organization; the program emphasis (academic vs. vocational); the degree of dependence or cooperation with other specialized services; the level of training provided; the selection of students for enrollment in various programs; and the reality factor in terms of level and practicality of the training provided.

(b) There is little evidence that programs were developed or show any special concern relative to the vocational interests of learning disabled students. The reverse is most often the practice. The student takes what has been offered and what has been developed for persons other than the learning disabled. As stated previously, programs have not included the learning disabled student for a long enough period of time to be able to follow them through to employment.

(c) The area of counseling is also lagging in terms of knowledge about learning disabled students and their vocational possibilities and needs. The understanding that many or most of these students are intellectually capable creates big problems for most counselors. In the absence of special vocational programs, counselors commonly direct the students into academic programs with the hope or belief that the learning disability may be remediated and the student may enter into a vocation that does not need specific training at the secondary level.

When counselors direct students to existing programs, they are usually programs that are intellectually below the student and provide training at a very basic level that many L.D. students can learn with a minimum expenditure of time and effort. These are programs that completely discount the intellectual ability of the students and lead to further frustrations.

(d) Because of the division or lack of knowledge, communication and understanding among teaching personnel in the existing vocational programs, viable options are not utilized in providing and reinforcing the instruction in the special vocational skill areas. Specialized training would provide the instructional personnel with the necessary understanding of the learning disabled student and would provide the instructor with the skills and competencies to adjust and adapt the existing materials and methods for

use with the L.D. student. The content has to be the same but because of the varied nature of the disability the interaction between teacher and learner has to be understood and necessary adjustments made.

The presence of a resource teacher in vocational subject areas as we know the resource teacher in the academic subject areas is without question one of the most important components of a program if success is to be expected. Regular programs have learned through experience and necessity of the importance of the resource teacher. Similar positive results can also be achieved in vocational areas.

(e) Concerted cooperative efforts involving special education, vocational education and career education undertaken at approximately the seventh grade level can and should develop comprehensive programs that will take advantage of the personnel's expertise, program evolvement, and all related current information on specific teaching methods and materials, and more specifically, employer needs and job opportunities.

Clearly formulated adjustments directed toward seeking ways to include rather than rule out the learning disabled student can be developed such as at the BOCE, Basic Occupational Education Program⁴ in Elmsford, New York. This is a program that accepts students with learning problems although not specifically labeled, and provides each with an opportunity to enter into a basic occupational education program in designated areas but at a lower developmental skill level

than usually expected and not only allows additional time at each level but is so constructed to permit the development of a very high or specialized level of vocational competence.

What has been demonstrated in this particular program is contrary to the known fact that many "special" students who cannot qualify at the very basic entry level for some programs are eliminated permanently. This program has adjusted the entrance requirements downward and has found that once in, many of these students can learn and can make continuous steady upward progress and eventually complete all that is expected in the defined programs.

(f) The programs examined in this study, although purporting to be of good quality and clear in definition and purpose, have to be considered as in their infancy in a relatively new area of specialized teaching. Strategies that will permit the evolution of programs which have the capability to meet the needs of the learning disabled are still quite distant because of the initial lack of planning in developing something specific for a group of students characterized by learning problems not previously understood. The lack of a particular strategy permitted the expansion of existing programs so as to include the learning disabled while at the same time ignoring the explicit differences that this clientele brought to any previously existing group. The mistake in strategy development was one of program adaption rather than program innovation.

(g) Limitations, restrictions and variations in forms of organizations, administrative models, number of pupils, facilities, equipment, materials, long and short range goals and expectations, personnel preparation - competency - coordination and cooperation among various departments and agencies have all had adverse effects on the development of any attempt to begin to identify promising practices or procedures.

Specific instruments such as MIND and JEVS, which have been used with non handicapped populations, were owned by two of the programs visited but had not been administered to any of the students.

Because of the varying nature and subsequent differences among learning disabled students, many problems can be contemplated if widespread use of various tests and inventories were to become an important part of programs. There is a definite place, but importance compared to other more individualized considerations, has to be minimized.

The newness of these programs plus the initial lack of systemized planning has to date produced little data which may be utilized to develop some standards for measurement of program effectiveness. Because of the mentioned lack of means to measure program effectiveness, there also lacks means of measuring cost effectiveness of any program and limits the value of passing any judgment at this time on

on the degree of practicality and success of any of the programs examined. This lack of standardized information also limits the possibility of any recommendation relative to cost, exportability, and eventual employment opportunities.

1. Management Analysis Center, Inc., Improving Occupational Programs for the Handicapped. Prepared for the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D.C., 1976, 6-7.
2. Ibid., p. 6
3. Ibid., p. 6
4. BOCES, Southern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services, 17 Berkley Drive, Port Chester, New York, 10573.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been formulated as a result of the exposure to and examination of secondary level special education programs. These conclusions can serve as points of comparison for both self-evaluation and future direction for systems intent on developing a specialized program utilizing existing major components.

1. A great majority of secondary level learning disabled programs are simply a continuation of elementary and junior high programs which are academically oriented and stress the sequential development of academic skills.
2. A great majority of existing secondary learning disabled programs are conducted under the sole direction of the special education department.
3. There exists a clear-cut division or separation between Special Education and Vocational Education Departments at all educational levels; state, local and within individual school buildings.
4. There is more than a small amount of evidence that "parental expectations" often dictate or influence the type of secondary programs that exist.
5. Regular Secondary Level Vocational programs as a rule do not permit "known" learning disabled students to enroll.

6. There appears to be a trend on the part of some Vocational Education programs to purposely avoid identifying the educational problems of the students, but there is evidence that many students are either "slow learners" or "turned off" and special vocational programs have been developed to keep the students enrolled.
7. Secondary Special Education Vocational Programs usually mean some form of Occupational Education originally developed for Educable Mentally Retarded students.
8. There is evidence that individualization, realism and practicality are absent in many secondary programs and that some school districts are not concerned with filling a particular time span of approximately four years during the learning disabled student's life.
9. Individualization of plans and programs for each learning disabled student must be provided for and can in many situations fit into an existing framework, if departments of Guidance, Special Education, Vocational Education, Career and Consumer Education can coordinate their efforts.
10. There are enough indications that the regular special education teacher is not qualified to provide the quality vocational education programs that the secondary level learning disabled student is entitled to and that the most expedient and efficient means to achieve the desired results would be to look to the vocational teacher with special education preparation.

OUTLINE OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED
OCCUPATIONAL/VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM
FOR LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS

Developed by:

Dr. John T. Cassell
Richard P. Maiolo

(Because of the varied nature of a learning disability and of the wide range of differences that may occur within a learning disabled student or among learning disabled students, the key to successful planning for each student is individualization.)

System Definition

An individualized system for the delivery of occupational/vocational training with an emphasis on exploratory, pre-vocational, occupational and on-the-job activities, including basic and related academic services.

System Components

Initial Interview - Student data collection and orientation to the system.

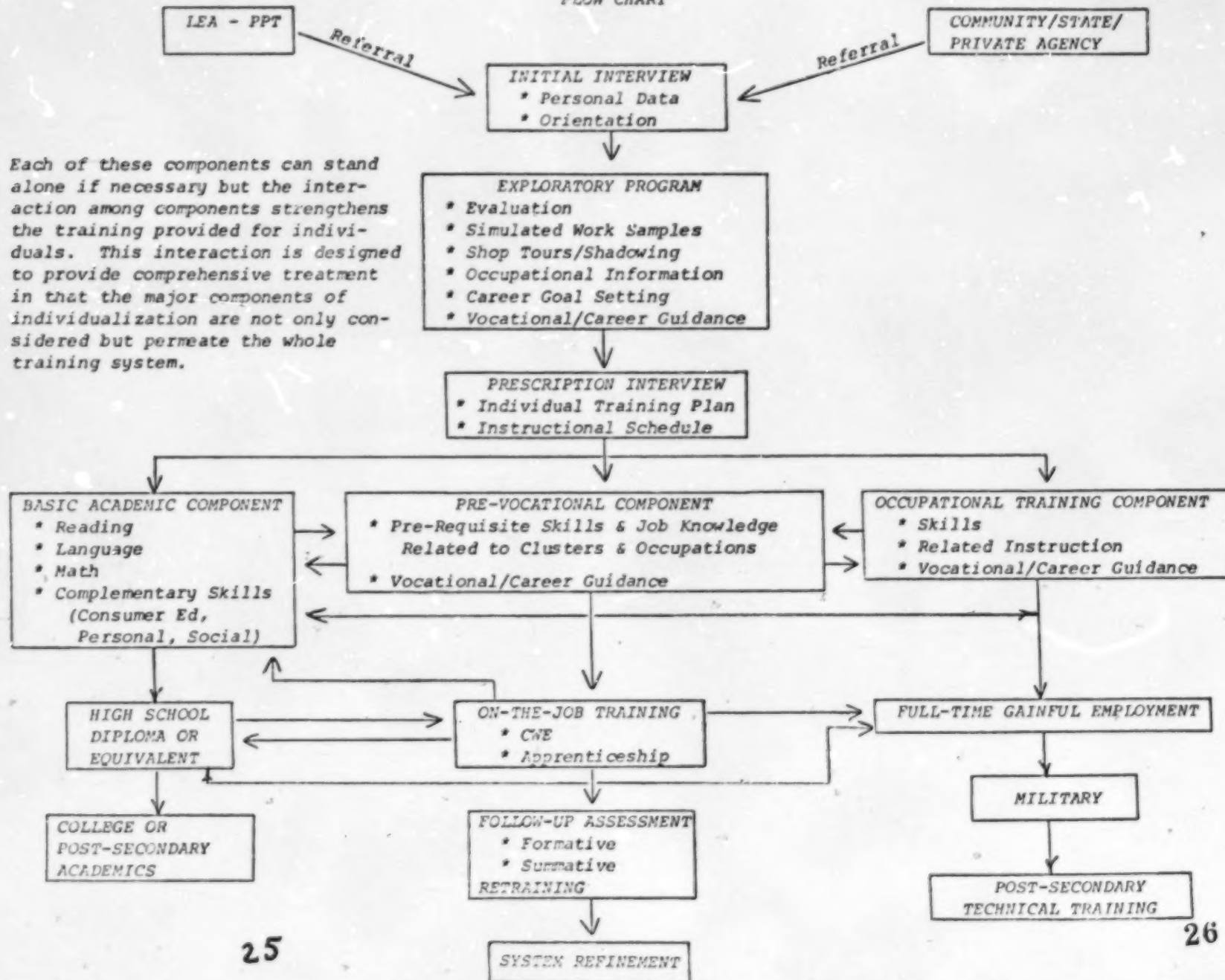
Exploratory Program - A series of planned activities based on the cluster approach to career/vocational education designed to expose student to occupational and vocational options. The exploratory component allows the student to gain pertinent information about self and occupational and vocational options as well as give component staff information regarding student abilities and potential.

Prescription Interview - Determining the individual intervention plan; establishing individual goals and detailing the instructional schedule.

INDIVIDUALIZED OCCUPATIONAL/VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM

FLOW CHART

Each of these components can stand alone if necessary but the interaction among components strengthens the training provided for individuals. This interaction is designed to provide comprehensive treatment in that the major components of individualization are not only considered but permeate the whole training system.



Basic Academic Component - Diagnosing and prescribing for individualized learning difficulties; providing personal social skill training including consumer education, health for individualized improvement in employability status.

Pre-Vocational Component - Occupationally oriented instruction in pre-requisite and entry level skills and knowledges.

Occupational Training Component - Vocationally oriented instruction in specific and specialized skills and knowledges in chosen career/vocational fields.

On-the-Job-Training Component - A series of options which enable the student to put learned skills and knowledges to use in real work situations.

Placement Component - Activities related to post-program placement in colleges, full time gainfull employment, military service or post-secondary technical training.

Follow-up and System Refinement Component - Data collection (formative and summative) for the purposes of retraining or system refinement.